



Out-of-time reunion in a rough-hewn landscape of sounds: William Dazeley as Jesus, with the apostles

Spellbound over Supper

HARRISON Birtwistle's *The Last Supper* inhabits the borderline between ritual and real-life event, though not everyday. The music makes it all seem extremely palpable. Birtwistle is uniquely gifted at imagining a rough-hewn landscape of sounds with text robustly embedded. Does it need to add up? Is it all meant to fit together persuasively, or just to impress and provoke? As music, theatre and singing it seems enormously powerful and effective — even if some of the words and argument are naive, muddled and trying to have it both ways. The first-night audience was spellbound.

Birtwistle is not a melodist in the sweet-tuned sense, but writes gratefully for the voice. The prologue figure Ghost, done with passion and beauty by Susan

THE LAST SUPPER ★★

Glyndebourne

Tom Sutcliffe

Bickley in blue velvet frock, sings really memorably, mediating between audience and stage pictures with her simply-expressed arguments. So too, among these apostles gathered for an out-of-time reunion, do the forceful countertenor Andrew Watts as James and the refulgent tenors Michael Hart-Davis as Thomas and Hilton Marlton as Simon the Zealot.

The theme is the forgiveness of Judas, betrayer of William Dazeley's affectionate Jesus. Without Judas's weakness or greed or politics, Christian theology would (perhaps) have been stillborn. Birtwistle in a

similar exercise to Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* makes Tom Randle's fascinating Judas the most sympathetic of all his characters, though none of Birtwistle's creations is as fascinating as Bulgakov's Matthew. Birtwistle, highly imaginative musical sculptor, carves out an odd and original dramatic situation which challenges us with questions that resonate potentially against current ecological discontents. The music, conducted with flair and fervour by Elgar Howarth, is easy to assimilate and dignifies the strange tale by evoking its metaphysical and historical backdrop. Martin Duncan's uncomplicated production and Alison Chitty's clear-eyed designs negotiate the implications with inspired tact.

● *Until 26 August (no dinner interval).*
Box office: 01273 813813.

Top of the charts

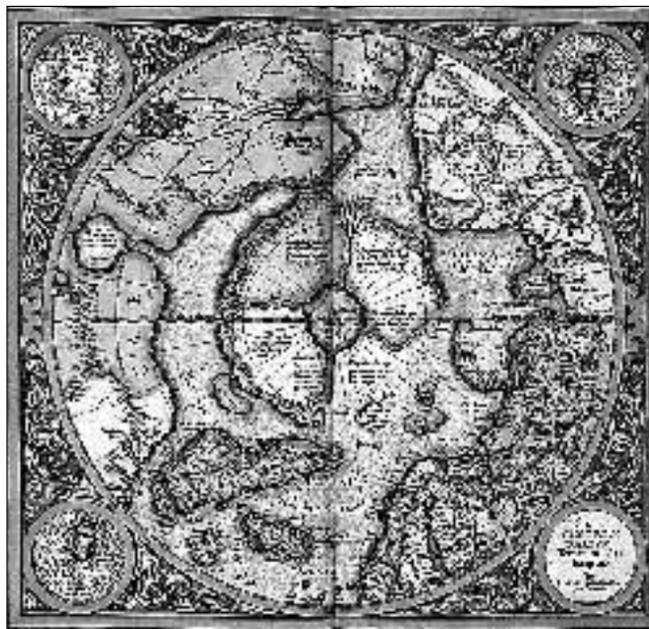
LIE OF THE LAND ★★

British Library

Nick Hackworth

AS INNOCUOUS as they may seem, your A-Z and World Atlas are, like all maps, prejudiced and biased. To prove the point the British Library has assembled an exhibition that spans five centuries of mapmaking and includes exhibits from all over the world. Not that the British Library is suggesting that all cartographers are born liars (though based on the evidence on show it seems a good number of them are), merely that all maps are inherently subjective and that the assumptions upon which they are based has a serious effect on our perception of the world.

Even the complex but apparently apolitical task of mapping a round earth onto a flat piece of paper is fraught with ideological dangers. A holographic display near the entrance reveals at one angle the familiar image of the Mercator projection of the world, drawn up in 1569 and still a global standard, and at another the Peters projection created in 1974. The former accurately represents the shape of the continents but not their size, the latter their size but not their shape. So, taking the maxim that



Size matters: Mercator projection of the Arctic circle

"size matters" to heart and given that Europe and the US profit most from his misrepresentation of size, it is easy to see why Mercator's projection is seen, literally, as an example of the first world's overblown sense of self-importance. In the Peters projection, dominated by the land masses of the southern hemisphere, Europe suddenly looks like a geographical backwater.

Elsewhere, maps of all kinds are on display, some drawn-up with sinister intent, others amusing but mostly harmless expressions of the vanity of those who commissioned them. Into the sinister category fall a Nazi map pinpointing concentrations of Jews and gypsies in Slovakia, a map to aid Cromwell's brutal exploitation of Ire-

land and a map drawn up during the TUC's General Strike of 1926 to help the British government suppress a portion of its own people. Meanwhile, a pompous map of the great Quaker families in Darlington, their houses lavishly illustrated and names listed on the map key, circumscribing the acceptable gene pool, represents the cartographic equivalent of vanity publishing.

The exhibition dries up around the present age but in fact our digital age has seen the link between information and power grow ever stronger and thus we can expect more additions to the sinister category in the future.

● *British Library, 96 Euston Road. Until 7 April 2002.*

Nature's way

PROM 26 ★★

Royal Albert Hall

Rick Jones

NOW that we have moved into the 21st century it is becoming clearer how innocent we were in the last millennium. Haydn's nature-loving oratorio *The Seasons* was first performed way back in 1801 when the countryside seemed to be a place of unquestionable virtue and honesty. Now, alas, we discover that rural Britain reeks of deceit and greed. Still, the resident musicians at the Palace of Esterhazy in Eisenstadt, where Haydn worked for most of his life, gave every impression that they appreciated the composer's view in last night's Prom. The strings danced freshly beneath effusive arias and choruses while selected woodwind shaped lyrical solos and provided humorous effects. The horns were busy in Autumn. They stumbled initially but their invigorating quartet in the stag hunt glowed with brassy resonance. The original English text was by Scots poet James Thompson, who also wrote *Rule Britannia*. His denunciation of the cruelty of hunting was omitted by Haydn's librettist, Van Swieten. So too was a passage about a man freezing to death in a snowdrift. Haydn's and Van Swieten's is a censored, protective version.

Simone Nold was an excellent short-notice replacement soprano. Her duet with tenor John Mark Ainsley in praise of the protestant work ethic (All benefits come from thee, O toil!) won a spontaneous burst of slightly ironic applause. Earlier she wisely warned of smooth-talking city folk (mincing dandies) in a tone of delicious simplicity. Bass Neal Davies darkly compared winter to old age when drunken carousing is no longer possible and "virtue alone remains". The bright, youthful, alert and untiring voices of the 100-strong Wiener Singakademie revelled in the whooping grape-gathering song and relished each brilliantly contrapuntal choral fugue. Conductor Helmuth Rilling crouched low on the podium and did not allow the music to come to any but natural rests.

● *Tonight Manfred Honeck conducts the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in Grieg's Peer Gynt with soloists Barbara Bonney and Bo Skovhus and narrator Simon Callow. Box office: 020 7589 8212.*



Jumping with marsupial joy

THE AVALANCHES ★

Electric Ballroom

Max Bell

AUSTRALIA. We sent them our most feckless criminals and this is how they repay us. Better than we are at cricket, rugby and hip-hop? Must be the kangaroos. The Avalanches from Melbourne arrive in a landslide of critical acclaim, which gives pause for thought, until you realise they're dance music's answer to *Men At Work*.

Undeterred by fashion, various members were in groups like *Swinging Monkey Cocks* and *Quinton's Brittle Bones*. They claim allegiance with *Johnny Mandell* and *The Beach Boys* as much as the *Wu-Tang Clan*. We're dealing with a hybrid that bites and smiles at the same time.

Still, as mixers/samplers they don't accept second best. The hit album *Since I Left You* has knocked out all comers. Funny, smart, wildly eclectic, its punch bag of tunes makes the *Beastie Boys* sound like *Dame Vera Lynn*.

Decks, cowboy hats Ferocious: The Avalanches and a ferocious live show preceded by a disco cabaret ensures party time for *Robbie Chater* and chums. Trouble is they aren't as good as the preamble of America and CSN&Y, nor as deviously debauched as truly great Aussie bands like the *Hoodoo Gurus* and *Flash and The Pan*.

Maybe that's over critical but they definitely do not reproduce the super-smooth segues of their album. On the other hand they make you jump around a lot. It's that mad marsupial energy one supposes. And we did beat them at that swimming thing, even if we came third.



Ratings: ○ adequate, ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor